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World Policy Institute
New School for Social Research
777 United Nations Plaza
New York, New York 10017
Telephone (212) 490-0010



NUCLEAR SECURITY AND THE SOVIET COLLAPSE

*Daniel Ellsberg, interviewed by
Jerry Sanders and Richard Caplan*

If the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989 marked the beginning of the final chapter of the Cold War, the bungled Moscow coup of August 1991 brought the conflict to an equally dramatic close. The hard-line effort to preserve an embattled Soviet Union served instead to hasten the demise of the once mighty communist empire. The train of centrifugal forces set in motion at Berlin now hurtles at accelerated speed into a new and uncertain era. Like all great historical transformations, this one is characterized by new opportunities and new dangers, not least for the prospect of world peace and security.

Deprived of the Manichaean struggle waged by Washington and Moscow, nuclear weapons and the esoteric litany of deterrence that gave them purpose and meaning have been rendered largely obsolete. Cold warriors can retire, and the tens of thousands of weapons they accumulated can be destroyed. Military budgets can be slashed, and tens of billions of dollars can be reinvested to address the new threats posed by economic instability and environmental imbalance. On the downside, the demise of central authority raises worrisome questions about command and control of the former Soviet Union's nuclear arsenal. Will the newly formed commonwealth arrangement hold or will its independent republics—especially Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, and Kazakhstan—succumb to hubris, taking control of the weapons in their territories so as to gain the status that comes with being a nuclear-armed state? At what point might beleaguered

Daniel Ellsberg, a former State and Defense Department official, is a senior research associate of the Center for Psychological Studies in the Nuclear Age at Harvard Medical School. Jerry Sanders teaches peace and conflict studies at the University of California (Berkeley) and is a senior fellow of the World Policy Institute at the New School for Social Research. Richard Caplan is editor of World Policy Journal.

republics, faced with daunting problems at every turn, come to view nuclear weapons as bargaining chips to be used in negotiations with one another or with the West? Worse still, can the possibility be entirely discounted that tactical nuclear weapons might be employed in a civil war within or between republics? Or that, under circumstances of increasing desperation, the republics might sell nuclear materials and expertise to third parties through the international arms bazaar?

Whether one savors the opportunities or ponders the dangers, prudent security policy points the same way—toward rapid and deep disarmament by the shortest route available. This conflicts with the knee-jerk response of unreconstructed cold warriors, who are calling, as always, for stepped-up development and deployment of yet new generations of weapons even as their strategic *raison d'être* has vanished. In this regard, the Bush administration's surprise announcement of September 27 that the United States would scrap an entire class of nuclear weapons must be applauded as a significant step forward. In his televised address, President Bush outlined plans to dismantle or store the estimated 1,250 tactical nuclear weapons that are currently deployed in Europe and South Korea, remove nuclear weapons from surface battleships and attack submarines, and halt the development of mobile land-based missiles and new air-launched missiles. In addition, the president declared a "stand down" of the nation's Minuteman missiles and B-52s from 24-hour alert status. At the same time, Bush said that he would like to begin negotiations with the Soviet Union to eliminate multiple warhead missiles (MIRVs) from each superpower's long-range ballistic arsenal. Inexplicably, however, he appealed to Congress to maintain support for the B-2 Stealth bomber and the Strategic Defense Initiative ("Star Wars"), and declared that defense spending should not decrease by more than the 25 percent already planned over the next five years. This despite his acknowledgment of the changed nature of the Soviet threat—now primarily due to internal collapse—that had prompted the administration's bold initiative in the first place.

President Mikhail Gorbachev wasted no time in responding to the U.S. proposal, matching Bush's initiatives and going beyond them with a bold disarmament package of his own on October 5. Gorbachev readily agreed to destroy all land-based tactical nuclear weapons and to remove them from surface ships and submarines. In addition, he pledged to take Soviet nuclear bombers and more than 500 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) off alert and to scrap plans to produce a short-range air-to-ground missile. Then, adding unilateral initiatives of his own, Gorbachev said he would reduce strategic warheads from the 6,000 allowed under the Stra-

tegic Arms Limitation Treaty (START) to 5,000, implement an immediate one-year halt to nuclear testing in the hope that the United States would reciprocate, and cut conventional forces by 700,000 (from a previously announced figure of 500,000). Finally, Gorbachev proposed cutting offensive weapons by 50 percent more than the limits negotiated under START as well as creating joint systems to avert nuclear attack and starting talks on stopping production of nuclear material for weapons. The question raised on October 5, which has become more insistent in subsequent months, was whether Gorbachev would be able to deliver on these far-reaching measures. A corollary concern, now moved to center stage by the events of December, is whether the separate republics, or the recently formed commonwealth structure that now binds them together, will be willing or able to carry them out.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the Bush-Gorbachev exchange of initiatives was its no-strings-attached departure from the past practice of negotiated agreement. The latter approach, institutionalized under the rubric of arms control, more often than not served merely to establish rules for the arms race that gave the mutual superpower buildup an air of respectability and stability. The only weapons that ever seemed to be discarded were those put forward as bargaining chips to begin with, or those already made obsolete by next-generation technology. Even then, the process of negotiation and ratification took such an inordinate amount of time that, in a characterization that soon became a cliché, the agreement reached was often out-of-date before the ink was dry. This undistinguished pattern prevailed up until the Gorbachev era when, through the INF and START agreements on nuclear arms and the CFE talks on conventional forces, significant progress was begun toward actual reduction of still viable classes of weapons. The pity, looking back, is that Bush's preoccupation with the Gulf War and Gorbachev's understandable focus on staying one step ahead of disaster on the home front prevented faster movement and deeper cuts that could have eliminated much of the danger posed by the weapons now remaining. In the volatile post-coup climate, the need for rapid and dramatic reductions in nuclear weapons became doubly urgent. Despite having struck the right note with his bypass of ponderous negotiations, therefore, one must ask whether Bush's initiatives were not already too little and too late, given the splintering of the union and ever more tenuous authority of the central government in Moscow.

We asked this question, and others, of Daniel Ellsberg in the tumultuous period of mid-December. Ellsberg spent many years at the highest

levels of the U.S. national security establishment, where his special expertise was nuclear-weapons policy and war planning. (He drafted the Kennedy administration's guidance for general nuclear war plans.) After serving in Vietnam in the State Department, he played a prominent role in ending the war there when, as a strategic analyst for the RAND Corporation, he delivered the Pentagon Papers—a top-secret study of U.S. decision-making in the war—to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and, subsequently, to the *New York Times*. Ellsberg had been one of the authors of the 43-volume study, which detailed government deceit about the purpose and progress of the war and helped turn the nation against its continuing prosecution. Since that time Ellsberg has been an outspoken advocate of multilateral disarmament and demilitarization.

By dint of background and experience alone, Ellsberg brings a seasoned and independent voice to the security debate. But fortuitously, he also happened to be in Moscow at the time of Bush's announcement, a vantage point from which he was able to witness firsthand the evolving debate on nuclear weapons within Russia and the other newly independent republics. In the following interview conducted by this author and *World Policy* editor Richard Caplan, Ellsberg explains the urgency of breaking with past habits at this particularly critical moment in modern history and warns of the dangers of nuclear proliferation if "institutional inertia" is allowed to prevail in the post-Cold War era.

Jerry Sanders

World Policy: How real are the dangers posed by the breakdown of Soviet central control over nuclear weapons—the possibility that they will be used in a civil conflict between former Soviet republics, the prospect of diversion of fissionable materials and nuclear-weapons technology, and so forth?

Ellsberg: I think all of these concerns are valid and a basis for real anxiety over the long run. With the creation of the new commonwealth, it appears that the danger of conflict involving nuclear-armed forces on the territory of the former Soviet Union has been alleviated, at least in the short run. But the first real test of the stability of the commonwealth and the republican regimes lies just ahead, with harsh economic reforms in the dead of winter.

Even if the commonwealth survives its first season, we can't rule out the possibility that economic problems and ethnic unrest will produce civil conflict sometime down the road, raising the horrible possibility of

what Secretary Baker has called, "Yugoslavia with nukes." And even in the absence of internal conflict, the collapse of centralized authority over the territory of the former Soviet Union and the general erosion of social discipline has increased the danger of nuclear proliferation in a variety of ways, both in the immediate future and in the long run.

This is an urgent situation. Unless we can bring about a drastic change in the postures of the United States and other nuclear states toward policies of minimum deterrence and no first use, proliferation brings with it an increased likelihood in the long run that nuclear weapons, at least in limited numbers, will be exploded somewhere. This danger exists even though—and in part because—the ending of the Cold War has sharply reduced the risk that a crisis or limited war might escalate to all-out nuclear war.

World Policy: How, exactly, could the disintegration of the Soviet empire encourage proliferation?

Ellsberg: In two ways. First, the mere fact that the number of nuclear powers has been expanded almost overnight by four or more nuclear states is a setback to the nonproliferation regime, and could encourage other countries that might be on the verge of going nuclear to do so. More importantly, there is the potential for a hemorrhaging of fissionable material from the stockpiles of plutonium in the Soviet nuclear complex, as well as for the diversion of weapons components and even finished weapons. The breakdown of central authority and military discipline in the Soviet Union has created a situation in which practical control over the Soviets' 27,000 warheads—and especially the 17,000 tactical warheads—is very much in question. And the increased number of nuclear states makes it more likely that some of them will deviate from the nonproliferation aims they all profess to share.

World Policy: What about the formation of a new commonwealth and Russian President Yeltsin's statements during Baker's December trip to Moscow that all nuclear weapons will be under centralized command? Aren't these encouraging developments?

Ellsberg: Yes, but I think such assurances are premature and overstated. No simple assurances by any set of political authorities—or military commanders, for that matter—can eliminate the uncertainties surrounding nuclear weapons. Even under the new commonwealth, we are still facing

an uncertain period in which various parts of the system controlling those weapons—in other words, the various former republics where these weapons were deployed—may well have differing objectives and even be in conflict with each other.

And for all the talk of a unified military command, it is unclear how that will be translated into physical safeguarding and control of the actual weapons, especially the tactical weapons. Tactical weapons, after all, were never under the same kind of tight, hierarchic, centralized control as strategic weapons, but were linked with individual military units. These units answer increasingly to republican, rather than central, authorities. And no one even seems to know precisely how many tactical weapons there are—or where they are located.

Recently the *New York Times* reported the statements of U.S. officials that there were no tactical weapons outside the four republics that had strategic weapons, namely Kazakhstan, Byelorussia, Russia, and Ukraine. Well, that was a reassuring assertion, except that it was contradicted the very same day by stories in *Time*, *Newsweek*, and the *Los Angeles Times*, all of which maintained that there were still weapons outside those republics. The fact is, Soviet officials have said for years they have had tactical weapons in virtually all of the republics. Although at least some of those were apparently withdrawn from Azerbaijan and Armenia and the Baltic states, at this moment there seems to be a good deal of uncertainty as to just how many republics have such weapons and how many they have. Even in Moscow they may not know for sure, let alone in the republics themselves. There is great need for international cooperation on these matters—at Western expense, if necessary—and it can't come too quickly.

World Policy: If central control over nuclear weapons is consolidated, will we then be able to breathe easy?

Ellsberg: Not necessarily. Even that would not guarantee that there will be no leakage of nuclear technology. Because of the changes in the world environment and the economic difficulties it faces, the new commonwealth may not be as restrained about supporting other countries' nuclear efforts as the Soviet Union was in the past. The commonwealth could choose to follow in the footsteps of France or China, both of which have given significant aid in terms of expertise, testing, and perhaps even nuclear materials to other countries.

World Policy: What incentives would the commonwealth have for sharing nuclear expertise and technology?

Ellsberg: The same kinds of incentives that influence France and China—a need for hard cash, and a desire to enhance its diplomatic influence and strengthen its relationships with other countries by providing them with something they value highly. In the case of the former Soviets, of course, one has to emphasize cash above all. In the absence of massive Western aid, their need for hard currency is desperate, and nuclear weapons are, pound for pound, the greatest conceivable hard currency-earning export. For example, as Arjun Makhijani has pointed out, some 25 tons of plutonium were produced for the Soviets' breeder reactor program, which was then cancelled. This plutonium is just sitting there, not being used for anything. The incentive for the central government to sell some of it clandestinely is very large. By way of comparison, consider the challenge to police departments of storing as evidence huge caches of confiscated cocaine or heroin. It has a tendency to melt away—part of it, sometimes, to finance departmental programs like buying informants.

World Policy: Is there also the danger that individuals acting on their own initiative will contribute to nuclear proliferation?

Ellsberg: Yes. According to Chris Paine of NRDC [Natural Resources Defense Council] there are some 3,000 to 5,000 individuals with top security clearance out of perhaps 10,000 who work in the Soviet nuclear complex. Their incomes have been drastically cut now both by inflation and by the reduction in production. So they are individually subject to the same pressures as the commonwealth as a whole and the individual republics, and may seek to improve their incomes by yielding to the blandishments of "headhunters" from states with prospective nuclear programs.

World Policy: Do you think the Bush administration recognizes these dangers? Has it been doing enough to address them?

Ellsberg: I think the administration is definitely concerned about the potential disintegration of control over nuclear weapons in the Soviet Union. Clearly, it is worried about the fact that there are now four new countries with strategic nuclear weapons capable of reaching the United States—Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Byelorussia—and perhaps even more with tactical nuclear weapons. This explains the unilateral disarmament initiatives Bush announced in September. The administration would prefer

to see those weapons withdrawn from the non-Russian republics and placed under a central authority, whether it be Russian or commonwealth, and it wants to see the most "usable" and least controllable—i.e. tactical—weapons eliminated or at least withdrawn. I think the administration recognized that this couldn't be achieved in time by a process of negotiation, and it also understood that the Soviets themselves were not in a position to take the initiative on this, although they might be expected to match any U.S. moves.

World Policy: It seems that some of the dangers we are now facing could have been alleviated if the Bush initiatives had been bolder. What additional steps should the administration have taken?

Ellsberg: I think it was appropriate for Bush to focus on tactical weapons, since these pose the most serious and immediate risks for proliferation and for possible use in conflict. Bush made a very good start on this problem—in an unprecedented way long urged by parts of the peace movement—by acting unilaterally, instead of merely making proposals that would have led to prolonged negotiation while the problem continued to get worse. This allowed Gorbachev to take reciprocal measures much faster than he could have in the context of negotiations. I have to say that I was amazed and delighted that a U.S. administration acted in as bold, appropriate, and timely a fashion as it did. Still, there were a number of very important things missing from the initiatives.

Even on tactical weapons, the administration did not go far enough. Bush excluded airborne weapons from withdrawal—especially in Europe—and he proposed to store many of the weapons withdrawn, including the naval SLCMs [submarine-launched cruise missiles], instead of dismantling them and destroying the warheads. Thus, these weapons could be quickly and unilaterally redeployed at any time. And since he also failed to renounce the first use of nuclear weapons in principle, other countries of the world still find themselves potentially under threat of American first use in some future conflict. That could obviously have a bearing on the decision some of them are contemplating as to whether to acquire nuclear weapons for deterrence.

Moreover, despite the prior recommendations of the NRDC and others, the Bush administration dragged its feet during crucial transitional months in the fall on urging explicitly that all Soviet weapons be tagged—and those slated for dismantling be sealed—so they could be accounted for and eventually stored verifiably. Such a step would be part of a broader

program of accounting and verification needed to prevent the diversion of materials, weapons, and expertise to countries that might be pursuing nuclear weapons.

World Policy: Why did the Bush administration fail to take this step?

Ellsberg: Evidently the reason for not proposing this in the September package—it seems now to have been proposed by Secretary Baker on his trip in mid-December—was the reluctance of the Department of Energy and other parts of the U.S. military-industrial complex to accept the same kind of inspection that we would be asking of the other side. The urgent need to prevent proliferation has not yet overridden concerns about revealing industrial and military secrets.

The NRDC reports that Soviet officials are not only willing but extremely eager to have international cooperation and funding for the tagging, monitoring, storage, and dismantling of their weapons. However, they have wanted at least some assurance of reciprocity on this. The latest word from the Baker trip—as of December 19—suggests that in pursuit of American recognition and aid the republics may have relaxed this demand.

Nevertheless, in the broader interests of global nonproliferation, the United States should be setting an example of transparency in these matters, showing the world our own willingness to submit to bilateral, U.N., or IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] inspections of the kind we are now forcing on Iraq and want others to accept voluntarily.

Finally, along with his predictable failures to renounce first use or to declare a halt to nuclear testing, Bush did not make any proposal that was likely to be acceptable for reducing strategic nuclear weapons below START levels. His proposal to ban MIRVed [multiple warhead] land-based missiles had considerable merit, but in the absence of any mention of limitations on [submarine launched] SLBMs—particularly silo-busters like the Trident II missile with W-88 warheads—he must have known this proposal was too asymmetric for the Soviet military to swallow.

All of these steps would be critical to any serious effort to prevent nuclear proliferation worldwide. Their absence from the Bush initiatives lends some credence to the argument I heard frequently in Washington on my return that a major objective of the initiatives was to head off pressures for further disarmament and further cuts in the defense budget—for example, in funding for the B-2 bomber or SDI [“Star Wars”]—by getting out in front with a relatively dramatic package.

Nevertheless, my own hope as I read about these initiatives was that

the Soviets would not only match them but go beyond them and challenge the United States to go still further. That was what I urged in discussions and in radio and television interviews in Moscow in the week following Bush's speech of September 27, and in fact this was what Gorbachev did in his response on October 5.

Indeed, Gorbachev's list of reciprocal initiatives and proposals—in addition to matching all of Bush's initiatives—actually included most of the additional things I specifically wanted to hear: a moratorium on testing in pursuit of a Comprehensive Test Ban; a withdrawal of airborne tactical weapons along with ground-based and naval weapons; a call for a global commitment to a no-first-use policy; and proposals for deep cuts in strategic forces and an end to production of fissionable materials. These Soviet initiatives and proposals, to which the United States has yet to respond, form a practical agenda that I would like to see the Bush administration pressed from every quarter to sign on to.

Meanwhile, with Gorbachev evidently departing from the scene along with the Soviet Union, it would be good to see the commonwealth, its military leadership, and the heads of the individual republics explicitly endorse these same proposals. Indeed they should go beyond them—for example, to the monitored destruction of all tactical weapons and the near-total destruction of strategic weapons.

World Policy: Do you see any willingness on President Bush's part to go beyond his own limited initiatives?

Ellsberg: I suspect that in his own mind he remains as resistant as ever to certain of the Soviet proposals, such as a total test ban. Nevertheless, ever since Bush's unilateral initiatives it has seemed to me reasonable to hope that he had started a process that could gather momentum, a kind of disarmament race that could go much further than he initially intended. And to some extent, that has begun to happen, even apart from Gorbachev's response.

A dramatic example of this has been in South Korea. Despite Bush's initial exemption of airborne weapons from withdrawal, the administration soon followed up by announcing the withdrawal of these weapons along with ground-based and offshore naval weapons from South Korea. Then the South Korean government unilaterally renounced the production or possession of nuclear weapons, and invited North Korea to inspect bases and installations in the south to verify the absence of nuclear weapons.

This combination of initiatives has put crucial pressure on North Korea to permit inspections of its own nuclear facilities, which may well serve to abort a North Korean nuclear weapons program, and has already cleared the way to unprecedented rapprochement between the Koreas, starting with a nonaggression pact. There couldn't be a more dramatic illustration of the contribution that unilateral initiatives of redeployment and renunciation by a nuclear state and its allies can make — along, certainly, with other factors — to the prevention of proliferation.

World Policy: Have there been other instances in recent months of the disarmament process taking on a momentum beyond what Bush may have intended?

Ellsberg: Yes, there have. Since Bush's speech, NATO has cut in half the number of airborne tactical nuclear weapons to remain in Europe, and the rest are likely to go before long, in response to pressure from allied publics on their governments. That points to a general principle: just how far and how fast this process goes depends critically on public pressure. This is the challenge right now to us in the peace movement. There are not just dangers in the present fluid situation; there are also breathtaking opportunities.

Another example: within 24 hours of Bush's speech, his strong plea that the defense budget as a whole be maintained at current levels — which may have been one of his major objectives in making the speech — was strongly challenged in Congress. The challenge was a direct result of the explicit rationale Bush had given for his package of unilateral measures: namely, his statement that the military threat from the Soviet Union had disappeared.

Bush's removal of bombers and some missiles from alert status after a generation of hair-trigger readiness was widely described as "mainly symbolic," but it was very powerful symbolism. It underlined his words declaring the end of the Soviet threat — the threat that has been the basis of swollen Cold War military budgets up until the present day. Whatever Bush intended, the combination of his words and actions had an inescapable logic that demolished his argument for continued "modernization" of nuclear weapons or for defense budgets even half the size of the current one. But again, it is up to us in the public and to the peace activists and lobbyists to see that Congress acts on that logic this spring, by slashing and converting the military budget.

World Policy: What is your view of the statements of some major republics in the former Soviet Union that they want to be nuclear-free zones?

Ellsberg: Obviously, that is always a very welcome statement, whenever it is made. It was the position that the leaders of Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Byelorussia took prior to the August coup attempt, when they all were, in effect, provinces of the empire. And it is what Ukraine and Byelorussia have just reiterated to Secretary Baker, as of December 19. But in between, reports of each of their positions have varied so frequently that it is hard to be entirely confident of what their policies will be in the future. That applies not only to these three republics but to some others that may now have tactical weapons.

Russia has indicated all along that it means to keep strategic nuclear weapons as long as the United States does. Kazakhstan recently said it plans to keep nuclear weapons so long as Russia has any. Ukraine and Byelorussia now say that they want to become nuclear-free zones as soon as possible, even if Russia retains some nuclear missiles. But if civil strife erupts this winter or later, leading to the prospect of conflict between republics, I wouldn't be surprised to see Ukraine's President Leonid Kravchuk or a successor revert to a position similar to Kazakhstan's—which was also Ukraine's position throughout most of the fall until Baker's visit.

Kravchuk's reiteration of the intention to make Ukraine a nuclear-free area was apparently motivated by an urgent desire for U.S. recognition and aid. It indicates that the Ukrainians are now more concerned about their relations with the United States than about their relations with a nuclear-armed Russia. Their willingness to forgo nuclear weapons is welcome, but it seems too soon to be sure that their position will not shift back again, before the weapons are gone. The point of this observation is not to be pessimistic, but to recognize the urgency of cooperating with Ukraine's latest commitment to become nuclear-free quickly, acting in every way to support it, and encouraging others to follow the same path.

Almost surely that means acting in a variety of ways to encourage Russia, too, to make the maximum reduction of its strategic forces, to eliminate tactical weapons, and meanwhile to reaffirm the Soviet commitment to forgo the threat or implementation of first use of nuclear weapons under any circumstances.

What I found during my visit to Moscow was that this last commitment on the part of the Russians can no longer be taken for granted. The day before President Bush's initiatives were announced, I was told by Andrei Kortunov, a leading strategic analyst at the USA and Canada Institute—

he is known as the author of a radical proposal for the Soviet Union's unilateral adoption of a minimum deterrence posture of 500 mobile warheads—that for cost reasons there was likely to be “a resuscitation of nuclear weapons” in the states of the former Soviet Union, including Russia. Because of budget constraints, he said, there was a growing conviction that “we cannot afford to defend our far-flung frontiers—against the Chinese or Central Asians—with conventional means alone.”

I was appalled. He was, of course, referring not to deterrence of nuclear attack but to a supposed need for first-use nuclear threats. If such views were coming to prevail, it meant that the Soviet commitment to no first use, our aspirations for a nuclear-free world, and even hopes for the abolition of tactical weapons were all moribund.

What I was hearing was the very reasoning, based on costs and budgets, that had led to the Eisenhower “new look” policy in 1953 of primary reliance on nuclear weapons: “more bang for the buck.” The belief that nuclear weapons were a relatively cheap and effective—and adequately prudent and legitimate—substitute for conventional defenses had led, over the course of 30 years, to the seeding of Western and Eastern Europe with tens of thousands of tactical weapons and to their backup by 25,000 strategic weapons on hair-trigger alert.

The same belief, from 1991 on, could keep thousands of these same warheads in Russia and half a dozen other republics indefinitely, and encourage thousands of new ones in other countries around the world. Under these circumstances, I couldn't believe that another 40 years of limited wars and nuclear threats would pass without any of those weapons exploding on people.

It was precisely because this proposed Russian policy was, as Kortunov pointed out in a later conversation, “just what NATO had done, after all,” that I was so dismayed. He was projecting a replay, in post-Soviet Russia in the post-Cold War era, of the most irresponsibly dangerous policy choices that had ever been made in human history.

World Policy: Do you really think such an approach might prevail in Russia or the other republics?

Ellsberg: I don't know. Obviously, it was not the view of Gorbachev or [Soviet Foreign Minister] Shevardnadze, but that doesn't tell us much about the future. The viewpoint Kortunov was describing did not reflect Bush's unexpected initiatives, which were made the morning after my talk with Kortunov, nor was it evident in Gorbachev's responses a week later. This

kind of reasoning certainly isn't part of Kravchuk's present position, nor have either [Kazakh president] Nazarbayev or Yeltsin shown any inclination for it. Maybe it has been overtaken by the "disarmament race" and by the pressure of U.S. criteria for recognition and aid.

On the other hand, maybe this attitude has just gone underground. After all, thinking can change quickly. What Nazarbayev is saying today—that he does not propose to leave Russia with a monopoly on nuclear weapons—Kravchuk was saying too, a month earlier: and for both of them, this perception of the desirability of hanging on to nuclear weapons was something relatively new, something they felt they had discovered between July and September.

Kravchuk has been argued out of this by the U.S.—perhaps by an offer he couldn't refuse—but if things go badly it's a lesson that he, or his successor, might relearn. It was the United States that pioneered the notion that nuclear weapons have important multiple uses, and the U.S. has been teaching it to the world by its example ever since, at tragic risk to its own long-term security and humanity's.

World Policy: What exactly do these new states see as the advantages of possessing nuclear weapons?

Ellsberg: There is a common notion that nuclear weapons have never been used and have never proven useful since Hiroshima. I have argued for some years that this is false. Even if they are never actually detonated in combat, officials of nuclear states have perceived a number of uses for these weapons.

It is precisely this range of purposes that the Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and others began discovering as soon as they started thinking of themselves potentially as independent, sovereign possessors of these weapons. Not to my surprise, they very quickly began to think of a number of reasons to retain these weapons, especially when they noticed that they were next door to a large, overbearing neighbor with an aggressive, expansionist history, which not only was armed to the teeth with nuclear weapons but also had an enormous conventional superiority.

Nuclear weapons are useful, for instance, for acquiring international prestige and influence and for gaining access to international councils. They are also useful for attracting attention, causing concern, and ensuring that a country is taken seriously. Ukraine has experienced all these benefits in the past month, as have the other nuclear republics.

A more esoteric objective in possessing nuclear weapons is to have what Seymour Hersh, in the title of his new book, has called the "Samson option."

Under the Samson option, a country threatens to use nuclear weapons, even in a potentially self-destructive way, in order to convince an ally or patron to rally to its side in order to forestall the need to carry out this threat. According to Hersh, Israel's nuclear program was primarily intended for the purpose of influencing the United States in this manner. If the Israelis needed and did not get full U.S. support in a crisis, they would threaten or warn that they had no choice but to use nuclear weapons, with potentially uncontrollable results. In particular, they were prepared to target the Soviet Union, so that the United States would face the possibility of escalation to an all-out nuclear war. According to Hersh, Israel used its nuclear weapons in precisely this way in the 1973 war, with precisely the desired effect of convincing a reluctant United States to resupply the Israeli military. The French, too, always privately believed that what they were buying with their independent nuclear force was the ability to compel the United States to support them in a crisis.

World Policy: Would that same logic be applicable, say, to Kazakhstan today?

Ellsberg: Of course. And maybe Ukraine again tomorrow. If Russia ever began to make heavy moves to "protect" the Russian population across its Kazakh border, a Kazakhstan armed with nuclear weapons could count on getting much more attention for its point of view from the international community, and more helpful pressure on Russia to back off, than a Kazakhstan that had surrendered a nuclear monopoly to Russia, as Ukraine has been persuaded to do, at least for now. And that is true even if the implied threat of Kazakh first use looked suicidal or relied on a possible loss of control by leaders in Alma Ata to be credible.

Unfortunately—to cite another scenario—the Gulf War may have helped demonstrate the usefulness of the mere threat of nuclear weapons to the Soviet republics and other countries. It is commonly observed that nuclear weapons played no role in the war against Iraq, despite the fact that four nuclear powers were involved. But I would say, on the contrary, that they were used in the war and even used effectively.

World Policy: In what sense?

Ellsberg: First, I mean the word "used" in the sense that a gun is used when we point it at someone's head, whether or not we pull the trigger. And, indeed, if the opponent backs down without your having to pull the trigger then that was the best possible use for the weapon. In this

sense, I've found in my own research that the United States has used nuclear weapons a dozen times or more, often secretly, in confrontations since the end of World War II.

During the Gulf War, the Israelis made convincing statements that were clearly meant to convey that if Iraq used chemical weapons against their cities, they would respond with nuclear weapons. The United States, too, refused to rule out a nuclear response if there was a major chemical attack on our troops—which, after all, we expected. And both British and French officers leaked hints to the press that they would respond to a chemical attack with nuclear weapons (although this was officially denied by the British government).

We don't know for sure why Saddam did not use chemical weapons against Israel or against our troops in Saudi Arabia—we now know that he had the capability to do so on a large scale—but it is certainly reasonable to infer that one major factor was his fear of a nuclear response. And that inference is likely to be made by a lot of people. Which is to say, and I say this with great regret, that the world has been given an example of the successful use of nuclear weapons. I'm afraid that the direct result of this is rather likely to be some incentive to proliferation.

World Policy: Why didn't the Bush administration rush to lock in additional disarmament steps while the center still existed, while there was still a Gorbachev to deal with?

Ellsberg: I think there is a split within the administration and no doubt a strong ambivalence, even within the minds of some key decision makers, on some of these issues. There were news reports, for example, that Scowcroft and Bush had actually drafted a favorable response on such Gorbachev proposals as the ending of the production of fissionable material before the Madrid summit, but that Cheney had essentially vetoed them.

The U.S. attitude toward nuclear weapons more broadly is also ambivalent. It has been implicit in Gorbachev's proposals for a number of years that the worldwide abolition of nuclear weapons is a desirable goal, and that in the meantime nuclear states should possess no more than a minimal number of these weapons adequate to serve only one purpose—the deterrence of nuclear attack.

But neither of those propositions has ever been accepted officially by any American administration. Even presidents who were privately sympathetic to such ideas, like Kennedy and Carter, were pushed by their bureaucracies and domestic pressures into supporting endless “modern-

ization," nuclear threats, and preemptive "damage-limiting capabilities." The effect has been that all U.S. presidents have acted officially as if they perceived a variety of uses for nuclear weapons. Drastic nuclear disarmament has never truly been their practical aim. At the same time, their commitment to nonproliferation has been halfhearted. Preventing the spread of nuclear weapons and their use either as a threat or in combat have been assigned a lower priority than various other objectives. One administration after another has turned a blind eye to the "secret" nuclear programs of friendly countries like Israel, India, Pakistan, South Africa, and—until August 1990—Iraq. By the same token, the current administration may feel that it could live with friendly, nuclear-armed successors to the Soviet Union.

This, after all, would serve the interests of the institutions we might loosely describe as belonging to the military-industrial complex. For within these institutions—both the Cold War bureaucracy in our respective countries and the corporations and services and politicians who have fed off that process for so long—there are mixed feelings about developments that decrease threats and anxieties in the world. They prefer to continue to focus on adversarial relationships—suspicions, uncertainties, antagonisms—and on the need for military preparedness against those possible "threats."

Today, we are faced with a strong possibility that some of the states of the former Soviet Union will evolve in a repressive and authoritarian direction, that they will be armed with nuclear weapons and may possibly be in conflict with each other. Yet we find the administration is not doing everything it could to avert this. Why? Not necessarily because the emergence of market-oriented authoritarian and nuclear-armed regimes on the territory of the former Soviet Union is the administration's first preference. But perhaps because it is ambivalent about that development, which would not be without certain advantages.

Specifically, the emergence of such regimes could justify a continuation of the policy of strong military "preparedness" that has had considerable popular support in this country for 40 years, and that is seen during a recession as an important generator of jobs. If this policy continues, defense budgets would be permitted to decline only slowly from current levels.

World Policy: What other obstacles do you see to further nuclear disarmament?

Ellsberg: Another problem is the American public's growing allergy to

foreign aid. Obviously, one of the cheapest and fastest ways to improve U.S. national security would be for us to pay the costs of reducing the Soviet nuclear arsenal. We could take funds from the defense budget in order to dismantle Soviet weapons and secure storage of Soviet fissionable materials. But to go beyond this—say, by providing humanitarian assistance to the new commonwealth—would be regarded as “foreign aid,” and Bush is reluctant to be seen giving aid to foreigners at a time when he is under criticism for not paying enough attention to domestic matters.

The president also seems unwilling even to suggest breaking the budget deal of last year, which made it impossible to divert money from the defense budget to domestic needs or to foreign aid. And yet, the president’s speech on September 27—his announcement that there was no threat from the Soviet Union—immediately called into question the premises of that budget deal. And one could well say that the reality supporting a defense budget of \$300 billion—or even half that—had decisively changed a couple of years before that deal was achieved. The need to participate in providing enough aid to the commonwealth to avert chaotic breakdown, upheavals, conflict, and repression is one more reason why Congress must be pressured to undo the 1990 budget compact this spring, even over a presidential veto.

World Policy: What should the United States be doing to promote nuclear disarmament at this point? How can we build on the initiatives that have already been taken?

Ellsberg: Over the past several years we have seen almost unprecedented examples of people liberating themselves from illusions and dogmas that had ruled their lives and their states for generations. In doing so, the people of the former Soviet Union have acted to deprive us of the enemy that justified our own high level of defense expenditures over the years. We need to change our conception of priorities in national security, and of our needs at home and in the world, no less radically.

First of all, we have to accept the notion—and put it into practice ourselves, if we are to persuade others—that nuclear weapons are to be used only for the purpose of deterring nuclear attack. Not for “limiting damage”; for preemptive counterforce attacks; or for threatening first use as a substitute for conventional force, diplomacy, or nonmilitary sanctions. Abandoning these other objectives would clearly permit the reduction of our nuclear arsenals down to a small fraction—5 percent or less—of their current size. We should proceed to make those reductions unilaterally, calling

on the commonwealth countries — and eventually other nuclear states — to join us, and to engage in mutual verification.

Achieving global abolition of tactical weapons and reducing strategic weapons to “minimum deterrence” levels as quickly as possible should be regarded, I believe, as essential intermediate goals on the way to total abolition — ridding the earth altogether of nuclear weapons.

World Policy: What levels of strategic weapons would correspond to a minimum deterrent?

Ellsberg: There is no definitive answer to that, but as an immediate objective, we should establish a ceiling for strategic forces of something like 1,000 warheads on each side. Even within establishment circles there is coming to be a consensus that this is reasonable. A reduction to 1,000 weapons on each side would be a reduction of about 95 percent of current stockpiles, which now include some 50,000 weapons. Even so, 1,000 warheads is still an extremely large number, comparable to the total number both sides deployed at the end of the 1960s. The eventual level could and should be much lower.

World Policy: How would that compare to the size of the French and British arsenals?

Ellsberg: That would be on the order of what the French are approaching if they carry out their current plans for MIRVing and modernization. For numbers below that you would have to draw the British, French, and Chinese into the process, on the assumption that the Americans and the Soviets will not willingly reduce their own forces below that level unless the others do as well.

World Policy: Given the reduction of tensions between the United States and the former Soviet Union, is there the same urgency for the removal of the multiple warhead, or MIRVed, land-based missiles that have been considered so destabilizing because of their vulnerability to attack?

Ellsberg: In the changed political climate, it seems highly unlikely that a crisis or a false alarm could lead to pressures for preemption. Therefore, the risks associated with these weapons are not as high as they were. But that does not mean they are zero. As long as these weapons are in operational posture and political conflict continues to occur throughout the

world, you cannot say that there is no danger. For this reason alone it's very important over the long run to get rid of them.

That's why I thought the Soviets should accept Bush's proposal to eliminate MIRVed land-based missiles like the MX and the Soviet SS-18s. In exchange, as part of a "double-zero option," we could offer to get rid of our own silo-busting submarine-launched warheads—the W-88 warheads for the Trident II missiles. These weapons are being produced and deployed at great expense for no other reason than to put under threat and, if necessary, destroy Soviet strategic forces in their silos. What is the strategic rationale today for maintaining a silo-busting capability against Russian, Kazakh, Ukrainian, or Byelorussian single-warhead, silo-based strategic missiles? It makes no sense at all in the current or foreseeable political climate. The United States could save a sizable amount of money and improve strategic stability, and thus its own security, by totally foregoing further production or deployment of W-88 warheads and dismantling existing ones. Bush should also take the *unilateral* step of eliminating the MX and downloading the Minuteman III to a single warhead.

Eliminating the W-88 program would have the further great budgetary and environmental benefit of eliminating the need to reopen the Rocky Flats weapons plant. Likewise, reducing the strategic force to 3,000 or less would eliminate the need to reopen the Savannah River plant for tritium production, again with large savings.

World Policy: What about ending nuclear testing?

Ellsberg: That's another essential step in averting nuclear proliferation. And it is, of course, a minimum necessary requirement if other states are to be encouraged to renegotiate the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1995. The most reliable authorities say that testing could be ended right now without any danger whatever to American security. But to compromise with the claims of the nuclear weapons labs on both sides, we could set 1994 or 1995 as the deadline for the ending of testing. And within that time limit, we could agree on a limited number of low-yield tests—perhaps 10 to 20—in order to deal with the problems of improving the safety and reliability of nuclear weapons. Weapons labs in both the United States and the Soviet Union claim they need tests for this purpose.

A key element in all this would be for the U.S. government to change its attitude toward intrusive, comprehensive inspections—in the U.S. as elsewhere—related to all weapons of mass destruction. We need to begin seeing the existence of nuclear weapons beyond the lowest minimal deter-

rent level as a problem, akin to global warming, that needs to be dealt with cooperatively by humanity as a whole. We should regard these "excess" weapons essentially as dangerous, explosive, hazardous waste. The policy problem with respect to these objects should be not how to deploy and use them, but how to store them safely before eliminating them. Only if we ourselves act determinedly and consistently on such a conceptualization can we really ask other countries to forgo nuclear weapons altogether. We cannot hope for this when we ourselves continue to test new nuclear warheads, maintain excessive stockpiles, and insist on our freedom to initiate nuclear warfare.

We need to change our way of thinking not only in order to fight proliferation but also to free resources we urgently need. With the end of the Cold War the possibility opens before us of a drastic and comprehensive reduction in the arms budgets of all the nations of the world—starting with the United States and the nations of the new commonwealth—and the diversion of the vast resources now locked up in our defense budgets to meeting human needs ranging from hunger, development, and education to infrastructure and problems of the environment.

There is a Brookings Institution study, issued last fall, that supports reducing our defense budget by 50 percent over 10 years. But why should it take 10 years to eliminate the portion of our budget designed to address the Warsaw Pact threat—a threat that disappeared two years ago and clearly is never going to return? There is every justification for cutting the defense budget in half as quickly as we demilitarized after World War II—that is to say, in a year or a year and a half.

Of course this will not be done under the current budget deal, where defense savings can only go toward deficit reduction and would thus translate immediately into fewer jobs in a period of recession. So it should obviously be a high priority right now to jettison that budget constraint. The difference between cutting the defense budget in half even in, say, two to five years and doing it over 10 years is a sum on the order of half a trillion to a trillion dollars. We need to ask ourselves whether we are so rigid in our political economy and so rich that we can really afford to waste a trillion dollars on make-work expenditures that are totally unnecessary and highly dangerous.

World Policy: Do you have a wish for the new year?

Ellsberg: That the nuclear era would end with the Cold War. Of course, that's not what is happening. The superpower arms race is over (though

in terms of strategic arsenals it has not gone into reverse, at least in any serious way) but the era of nuclear proliferation may be about to begin.

Whether we avert disaster will depend on a lot of things, including the activities of those of us inside and outside of government who believe that the nuclear era should end now. The problem is that a long, drawn-out, piecemeal approach is unlikely to have much impact on the proliferation problem the world is facing. What's needed is a dramatic and comprehensive package of coordinated changes in policies and programs—an effort of the highest priority that expresses the desire of our society and our government to make a decisive shift in our relation to nuclear weapons.

The main precedent for that kind of effort is the very one that launched the nuclear era exactly half a century ago—the Manhattan Project. The events of the late summer and fall of 1991 have established conditions that make 1992 precisely the right time to create Manhattan Project II. The task of the second Manhattan Project would be—so far as possible and as quickly as possible—to undo the legacy of the first: *to free the earth of the threat of nuclear weapons*.

The original project designed and delivered a bomb in about three years. Complex as that problem was, the new task has many more varied dimensions, political and psychological as well as scientific and logistical, and faces even more obstacles. Nevertheless, I think a three-year period—which brings us to 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the first demonstrations of nuclear destruction—gives us a relevant initial deadline for achieving solid commitments on the part of nuclear states of the world to the principle of no first use (the rejection of nuclear weapons as an instrument of policy or warfare); the abolition of tactical nuclear weapons, with their total destruction by the year 2000; the ending of nuclear testing by 1995, and (preferably earlier) ending production of fissile material; the near-abolition (95 percent or more reduction) of strategic weapons by 2000; and, along with all other nations, adherence to a strengthened antiproliferation regime and the Non-Proliferation Treaty, including, at last, its disarmament aims.

Taken together, these measures should end the era of nuclear threats by 2000. And they would give realistic hope to Manhattan Project II's objective of ridding the earth altogether of nuclear weapons.

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